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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

Editorial Commentary

-- "A look at Assad's speech"

Columnist Oraib Rantawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Ad-Dustour (08/16): "Whoever listened to President Assad's 'great victory speech' would have thought for a split second that the 34 day battles had gone on in the Golan Heights and that Mr. Hassan Nasrallah is no one but a reserve member in the Socialist Arab Ba'ath Party and that Siniora is the prime minister of Syria and not Lebanon.... Lebanon's strongest characteristics in peacetime is its democracy and the strength of its society, and in wartime is its organized resistance on firm popular foundations. Where is Syria from all these lessons? Why does not Assad establish a stage of strengthening the society and democratizing the state? Why does he not launch the Syrian national and Islamic resistance that he so admired on the Lebanese front? Why does he not reproduce it on the Syrian level? And when the Palestinian and Lebanese people are waging the most honorable of resistance battles and wars and they are doing that in word and deed, why does Assad not allow the Syrian people to exercise such a right and duty?"

-- "Assad's resistance"

Chief Editor Ayman Safadi writes on the back-page of independent, centrist Arabic daily Al-Ghad (08/16): "Assad spoke as if he had just returned from the battlefield. He lectured about the steadfastness and the resistance as if the Golan itself was on fire in the face of the occupation. He forgot that people have memories and ears and eyes that did not register any Syrian action of resistance for decades and that have not seen from the Syrian anything other than empowerment over Lebanon and the Syrian people and subordination to Israel. Today, and after Lebanon came out of a destructive war throughout which they preserved their unity and their steadfastness in the face of the Israeli war machine, Assad comes out before them and the Arabs with a speech of betrayal and instigation that stirs dissention in Lebanon and plants the seeds of fighting and chaos.... The funniest part in Assad's speech is when he spoke about the resistance. The road to achieve peace, the Syrian president says, is the negotiations, and if they fail then the resistance in its various forms will constitute the alternative. Well, the negotiations have failed, so where is the Syrian resistance? The Syrian regime has not right to employ the Lebanese resistance as ammunition for its verbal and rhetorical arsenal.... The Syrian regime should have stayed silent since the war on Lebanon has removed its mask of nationalism."

-- "31 days changed everything"

Columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back-page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (08/15): "The sixth Israeli-Arab war, which has lasted one month and which has ended without a victor or a vanquished, will enter history as the beginning of a new era and the end of an old era. Pre-war Israel is not post-war Israel and pre-war Hezbollah is not post-war Hezbollah. So are Lebanon, the Arab world, and perhaps the Damascus-Tehran axis. Israel has been cut down to size. Its image as a strong nation that possesses an invincible army has been shaken, not only in the eyes of the Arabs and the world, but also in the eyes of its own people.... The Arab states have correctly reconsidered their position, first, to bridge the gap that has widened between the Arab governments and their peoples, second, because of the war's course and Israel's military failure, and third, because the Lebanese government has proved its unity and effectiveness on all levels - something that has not been expected. If it is true that Iran was behind this crisis with the aim of dangling its cards and deflecting attention from its nuclear program ... then the course of events has turned against Iran and its project to spread its influence in the Arab region has received a strong blow.... The Iranian influence in Lebanon and the rest of the region after the war is different to what it was before the war. The bubble has burst. It has turned out to be an air bubble. By the way, this will not be the only bubble that has burst or the only myth that has fallen. "

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